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# REALITY AND RELIGION

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*etc.*



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Price 50 cents

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HAZEN BOOKS ON RELIGION  
The Edward W. Hazen Foundation, Inc.

*Distributed by*  
ASSOCIATION PRESS  
347 Madison Avenue  
NEW YORK

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*The Hazen Books on Religion*

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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing, December, 1940



SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

AT CLAREMONT

California

41-4011

TO THE MEMORY OF

E. A. YARROW

MISSIONARY, DIRECTOR OF RELIEF, FRIEND OF YOUTH  
WHOSE HEROIC LABORS IN THE NEAR EAST SAVED A MULTITUDE  
WHOSE VISION AND GUIDANCE MADE POSSIBLE THE  
HAZEN BOOKS ON RELIGION

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## FOREWORD

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### CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE PRESENT CRISIS

#### I

THESE pages were planned in days of comparative tranquillity and security. They are being completed while the world breaks asunder under the most devastating cataclysm in a thousand years.

The tempo of both moods appears in what follows. We begin with a general inquiry into the nature of religion, and find it rooted ineradicably in the deepest experiences of all human living. We conclude with the Christian Movement facing to-day's crisis, and ask what healing it may hold for a civilization threatened with death. Midway in our study, we seek to confront that living Center toward which, in Christian conviction, all religious aspiration points, and from which proceeds such help for mankind's cure as Christianity yields.

This double perspective is neither confused nor accidental. It corresponds to both the dual character of human existence and the double significance of Christian faith.

Each one of us lives out his life in a particular day and era and locality and situation. Our epoch and surroundings enormously influence our life's experiences and outlook. It is this fast-changing panorama of outward circumstance that gives life its movement, its novelty, its adventure.

But there are also episodes, essentially unchanging amidst the swift alteration of public events, which each person traverses in much the same fashion, whatever his time or place. In every age and at every moment of history—during prosperity and depression, on frontier plains and amidst urban clamor, in luxury and in poverty, upon the smooth current of fair times and within the whirlpool of war or social convulsion—a woman writhes in anguish of body, terror of mind, and yet exultation of spirit in the unique yet ever-repeated experience which is childbirth. Two young people bend over the helpless mite of humanity which together they have brought into the world, dreaming for it a future that it can never achieve, giving to it love, sacrifice, faith that it may never adequately appreciate and can never fully repay. The wee life grows and cuts teeth and learns to toddle and to tattle, and passes through the familiar epidemics of mumps and measles and chicken-pox and puppy-love. Each life senses the awakening of strange new forces within, frightening in their power, baffling in their unfamiliarity, intriguing in their mystery. We fall in love, with romance and poetry and high expectation—Isaac and Rebekah, Romeo and Juliet, Aucassin and Nicolette, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett; the dress and times change, the inner experience how little. Each soul fights a solitary struggle with discouragement, loneliness, and the world's misunderstanding and cruelty. Men are baffled before the enigmas of children born blind, of disease and nature's cruel indifference; the Problem of Evil does not greatly alter with the passing ages. And the only satisfying light

upon those enigmas shines from rare spirits who triumph gloriously over handicap and injustice, proving life good. Still creeps on old age. The spark flickers, and is gone—death is precisely the same for every generation. These are the aspects of all human living that give it stability, beauty, deep satisfactions.

Life has these two aspects always. Each brings distinctive gifts to our experience and to our understanding. Too exclusive concentration upon the first creates a superficial, harsh, worldly nature. Preoccupation with the second leads to undue subjectivism, softness, morbidity. Both together constitute the “reality” of man’s existence. It is their interplay in mutual stimulus and balance that makes possible the breadth and depth and height of human living at its best.

Religion meets men in every phase of their pilgrimage—in the unique events that mark each man and each generation from all others, and in those deep inward happenings that every member of each generation repeats in closely parallel fashion. For men in all possible circumstances, Christian Faith must have light and strength.

## II

However, the question that presses most urgently is, “Has Christianity any meaning for this lacerated, gasping world of to-day?” It is in the throes of that world’s agony that men must live, as far into the future as eye can pierce. If Christian Faith is to commend itself to our loyalty, it must demonstrate its relevance to humanity in this tragic hour.

To this task, Christian Faith brings two special qualifications:

1. Christianity speaks as *an historic religion*, out of long association with human history and intimate familiarity with just such a world as ours. For nineteen centuries directly, and much longer indirectly, it has been watching, observing, studying the human pilgrimage. At every point, it has been closely involved with society and its problems. To Christian Faith, there is almost nothing new, unexpected, untested.

It took its rise, the Christian Movement, in a small, unimpressive, seemingly inconsequential band of religious enthusiasts.

It spread—with astounding rapidity—in all directions, through all classes and nations and races of the vast and polyglot Roman Empire.

Within two hundred years, we discover it firmly established in every principal center of population, of government, of education, and in thousands of smaller communities. We find it at the intellectual capital of the ancient world, Alexandria, meeting there two of the three greatest thought-systems of antiquity (Platonism and Stoicism), absorbing elements of each, correcting each by the power of its fuller truth, producing a more commanding and more enduring interpretation of Reality than either. We find it at the political capital, Rome, confronting there the most powerful imperial structure of the ages, adapting certain of its principles within its

own framework, ultimately outliving that vast structure.

Within four hundred years, we see it acknowledged as the religion of the civilized world.

Within five hundred years, we observe it standing threatened but unshattered amidst the crumbling ruins of the greatest material and intellectual achievements of the race—the only enduring institution in the disintegration of a whole civilization. We note it bearing within its own life most of what was salvaged from the accumulated treasures of a dying world, keeping them alive through dark and portentous centuries, delivering these treasures to the new culture of the Renaissance as it comes to birth. We see it furnishing unity and cohesion for the youthful and uncertain civilization.

Ten centuries after its origin, we discover it meeting the third great theory of Reality bequeathed by antiquity (Aristotelianism), transforming it, and embracing it within a more comprehensive and adequate view.

We watch its endurance through eight succeeding centuries. Almost in our own day, we see it confronting the newest arrival on the scene of history—the Modern World.

Christian Faith embraces the deposit of those centuries of varied experience. It speaks with a worldly-wise, a knowing Voice.

It has watched tens of thousands, tens of millions of men and women in the most intimate happenings of their pilgrimage—be born, come of age, struggle for truth, experiment with life, stumble, play the fool, fail,

succeed, die. For Christian Faith, there is nothing unknown, untried in individual experience.

It has observed communities, nations, societies, civilizations come to birth, mature in the fresh powers of new vitality, achieve dominance, dissipate their substance in arrogant pretense and debilitating vices, fight, suffer defeat, decay, and die. It has noted political and economic systems, one after another, appear, declare the authority of their principles, and go down to disintegration through the old familiar follies ever repeated. For Christian Faith, there is nothing unknown, untried in mankind's corporate existence.

It has listened to dozens of new philosophies in the first flush of their confident youth, each one proclaiming its final grasp on truth. It has learned something from each. It has watched each pass from pre-eminence and give place for the next.

It has seen one religion after another arise, declare itself mankind's true Messiah and Christianity's successor, and pass to a position of secondary influence. There is, for it, almost nothing unexplored, unweighed in human speculation.

To Christian Faith, the rise and fall of empires, of economies, of civilizations, of philosophies are hardly more novel than the rising and setting of each day's sun.

Through all the changes and crises of the successive centuries, the Christian Movement has endured. It has been caught within each passing culture and philosophy, enriched by its insights, revived through its vitality, contaminated by its follies and vices, threatened in its

dissolution. Yet Christianity has shaken itself loose from fatal entanglement and has persisted to meet the next event—the one continuing reality in two millenia of change, decay, and rebirth. From such a wealth of tested experience, Christian Faith gives its wisdom for today's crisis. Yes, it speaks with a very old Voice, a very wise Voice, a very shrewd Voice.

2. Christian Faith speaks as a religion that *takes history with utmost seriousness*. It exists within the flux of history. It derives its Message from facts and persons that are of the stuff of history. Indeed, just here is one of the marks that distinguishes Christianity from other religions.

*The Truth* that Christian Faith declares is not one of general principles to be discovered through speculation or mystic contemplation or magical disclosure or abstraction from life's course. It is truth *lived* amidst the on-going current of day-by-day happenings and to be known only in and through history's concrete events.

*The World*, as Christian Faith conceives it, is not a meaningless round of cyclic recurrence, or a vale of tears, or a prison-house constricting the self-realization of the human spirit. It is a stage upon which goes forward a drama of profound significance, through whose development souls are made and unmade, lost or fulfilled.

*God*, for Christian Faith, is no impassive Absolute removed from the blood and sweat of our human lot in perfect self-absorption. Nor is God a nexus of abstract principles, or a set of impersonal forces. He is a Doer,

ever at work in and upon this mortal scene, and there to be discovered and known.

Christianity's *Message* concerns actual historical happenings through which God makes himself known. It finds its norm in the mind and career and faith of a genuine human Life. And its culmination is the conception of an Order of Existence (*the Kingdom of God*) that surpasses complete realization within history and yet is to become ever more fully real within history. For its influence, Christianity rests confidence in the power of human lives and of its own historic Movement of life, *the Church*.

Indeed, Christianity comes to the world both as a *Message* and as a *Movement*. A *Message*—a body of convictions, of assertions concerning the World, Man, God, Society, and History, assertions believed to be true. But it is a *Message* derived from Christianity's age-long wrestling with the obdurate facts of history, and entrusting its proclamation and its hope to the influence of an historic *Movement*. From one perspective, Christianity is a *Message* that culminates in a *Movement*. From another perspective, Christianity is a *Movement* bearing a *Message*. The whole takes place within the toil and frustration, the triumph and fulfillment of that great historic reality that we call Society.

With such equipment and from such perspective, Christian Faith offers its interpretation of human life and of mankind's present need.

## CHAPTER I

### WHY RELIGION?

#### I

A GROUP of college students were talking intimately of their interest in religion, and especially of what had first turned them toward religion. At last, the discussion came to the inevitable query, "How can one be sure of God? When are *you* sure of God?" Three students spoke in quick succession:

The first—a sensitive, solitary sort of girl from a western college—confessed, "There is only one time when I really feel sure of God. When I am all alone, high up on a mountainside overlooking the Pacific toward sunset, sometimes in the quiet and beauty of that place, I am absolutely certain of God."

The second—also a woman, but a "pre-med" deep in research upon a complicated carbohydrate molecule—replied, "I'm afraid I've never been much of a beauty-lover. I'm city-born and city-bred. But, often in the lab, when my carbohydrate is under the microscope and I begin to get an inkling of its complexity and delicacy and order, I wonder how people doubt God. Then, I sense his presence clearly and surely."

The third—a Yale undergraduate, absorbed in work for down-and-outers in New Haven—broke in, "You two seem to me to be talking nonsense. Beauty means nothing to me. I've never studied chemistry. But, when-

ever I spend an evening at the Yale Hope Mission, talking with the unlucky fellows who drift in there, trying to convey to them a shred of confidence in the worth of living, then I'm dead certain of God and of his concern for those men. The only God I know is a God of moral striving, desperately in earnest about injustice and human need."

Each of the three students felt sure of God at times. To each, certainty came in quite different fashion—in Nature's grandeur, through experimental science, at the heart of the problems of society. Each professed to know nothing of the experience of the others.

It was sheer coincidence, but one cannot fail to note the close parallel to the three traditional aspects of man's experience of the highest—through appreciation of beauty, through search for truth, through response to moral challenge. To each the appeal came mainly to one of the three traditional sides of human nature—to the emotions, to intellectual inquiry, to conscience and will.

In their diverse approaches and in the limitations of each approach, these students were typical of people everywhere in their certainty of God. Most people rely on one or another of these three types of evidence. Yet it is obvious that all three are needed in a comprehensive experience and interpretation of Reality. Emotions, intellect, and will must each play its part in any full human life. Beauty *and* truth *and* the realities of moral struggle must give their evidence for any adequate understanding of our world. The most intimate

intimations of personal feeling, the drama of mankind, and the fathomless Universe must all be consulted concerning God. One of the foremost contemporary scientists reports that his interests work out mainly in three directions—in his professional researches in biochemistry, in the moving exaltation of high ritual, in the social significance of Russian Sovietism. His is a profoundly religious, as well as an outstandingly able, a strikingly well-rounded, and a very modern spirit.

It would appear that religion is somehow intimately involved in every major aspect of man's life, and of his relationship to the society that surrounds him, and to the Universe which is his dwelling-place. You recall Thornton Wilder's mailing address for a citizen of "Our Town":

Jane Crofut;  
The Crofut Farm;  
Grover's Corners;  
Sutton County;  
New Hampshire;  
United States of America;  
Continent of North America;  
Western Hemisphere;  
The Earth;  
The Solar System;  
The Universe;  
The Mind of God.

## II

What is religion anyhow? How does it arise in human experience? How did it begin among primitive

men? How does it first stir in a typical human life to-day?<sup>1</sup>

Religion begins in man's awareness, however dim, of Something beyond himself that is both "other than" all that is familiar to him and yet in some measure "akin to" his familiar life-experiences. Religion, then, is a relationship between two realities or sets of factors—man's self *and* a Beyond.

Since his own self is no passive automaton but a throbbing imperious being almost as mysterious and baffling as the Other-than-self, religion is man's attempt to work out adjustment with *both* sets of factors:

1. A Reality outside himself which surrounds him and conditions him, upon which he feels a measure of dependence, with which he must come to terms in some fashion—a Reality that both fascinates and frightens him.
2. Needs and desires within his own life of which he must take account and which he must seek somehow to satisfy.

On more careful examination, it is discovered that there are two main aspects to *each* of these two sets of factors.

1. The "Beyond," which stands over against man's life as one pole of his religion, always presents itself to him in two aspects:

- (a) There are some ways in which it appears to be

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<sup>1</sup>Of course, with many, religion is initially a heritage from parents and upbringing. What we have in view here is its beginnings in those without family influences toward religion.

"akin" to him. He feels "at home" with It. He can understand It. He can deal with It.

(b) But there is always that about It, also, which is "strange" and "foreign" to all he is and knows. It mystifies and perplexes him. It eludes his comprehension. It alarms him.

These two aspects of the Beyond, its kinship and its otherness, are never absent—from primitive man's obeisance before the magical *mana* to the Christian saint's confidence in the Gracious Friend of all true spirits. For the former, the gods or divine powers are always to some degree familiar with the ways of man and approachable by man through prayers and gifts, although the sense of mystery and inscrutable control predominates. For the saint, God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor our ways his ways, although we dare to call him "Father."

This is seen clearly if we scrutinize the three great enterprises of the human spirit in its contacts with the Beyond—the three principal aspects of man's nature reaching out for true relationship with that Reality which touches each of them.

The Beyond presents itself to man's *thought* as a *mystery*—but a mystery that man feels himself capable of solving, or in any event of penetrating. His effort yields the whole vast store of human knowledge. In its most ambitious phase, this is the enterprise of Science. But Science, seeking to understand and master the Universe, proceeds at every moment on the assumption,

often unrecognized even by scientists themselves, that the Reality that it aims to penetrate and interpret is *understandable*. That is, that It is not something wholly alien to the structure and powers of man's inquiring mind. Rather, that It is of such a character that that mind, functioning at its highest, is a suitable and competent instrument for the achievement of penetration. If this assumption should ever be discovered to be unfounded, the enterprise of Science would cease like silent factories in a deserted village, and the vast fabric of scientific "knowledge of the Universe" would topple like the proverbial stack of cards. It is an assumption —this assumption of "kinship"—that is progressively vindicated by Science's steady advance. It is never fully verified. The task of penetration is never completed. Nature is never wholly understood. Hence, the challenge, the adventure, the endless quest of Science. Science assumes that the Universe it seeks to know is both *akin to* and yet *other than* the inquiring mind of man.

Again, the Beyond presents itself to man's *feeling* as *beauty*. Beauty, whether in Nature or art or friendship, touches the human spirit, quickens response and appreciation, allures to imitation, to adoration, to reproduction, to creation. There is mystery—the inapprehensible, the unpossessable—about it: hence, its intriguing fascination and the artist's eternal dissatisfaction with his representation of it. But there is also something which can be reached and grasped. Indeed, were this not so, man would hardly be aware of Beauty, and

he certainly could not glory in it. The whole enterprise of Art is mainly the effort, always partially successful but never completely successful, to lay hold on That which never wholly eludes us but which we never fully possess.

If I could come again to that dear place  
Where once I came, where Beauty lived and moved,  
Where, by the sea, I saw her face to face,  
That soul alive by which the world has loved;  
If, as I stood at gaze among the leaves,  
She would appear again, as once before,  
While the red herdsman gathered up his sheaves  
And brimming waters trembled up the shore;  
If, as I gazed, her Beauty that was dumb,  
In that old time, before I learned to speak,  
Would lean to me and revelation come,  
Words to the lips and color to the cheek,  
Joy with its searing-iron would burn me wise,  
I should know all; all powers, all mysteries.<sup>2</sup>

Art assumes that the Beauty it seeks to reveal is both *other than* and yet *akin to* man's spirit.

Once more, the Beyond presents itself to man's *will* as *goodness*. The first beginning of the "moral consciousness" or "conscience" is a dim, fumbling awareness of what we ought to be, what in all truth we might be, and what we most certainly are not. And, later, of what mankind might be, ought to be, and is not. It is a call, an appeal, to the man-that-is from that which is

<sup>2</sup> John Masefield, Sonnets, No. 4, in *Poems*, New York, Macmillan, 1930, p. 346.

Beyond what he now is. The true life for each of us is continuous with this poor stupid, willful person I now am; else I should never be aware of it and to strive for it would be futile. But it is also very different from, *other than*, my present self; otherwise there would be no challenge, no rebuke, no adventure in the "moral imperative." Morality assumes that the goodness it seeks to realize is both *akin to* and yet forever *beyond* man's finest self.

To summarize, in every principal aspect of his experience, man is confronted by Something which is both like and yet different from himself. *Continuity* and *otherness*—these are the two invariable characteristics of Reality as it presents itself to man. It is "the Beyond which is akin." In philosophy's parlance, the Beyond is both transcendent to man's life and yet immanent within man's experience.

That is precisely as man himself would wish it. If Reality were wholly within his grasp—all knowledge attained, beauty completely possessed, the measure of the stature of moral manhood wholly achieved—then, indeed, would life be stale, flat, and unprofitable. Where would be mystery, effort, adventure, achievement, realization?

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for?

On the other hand, if that Beyond were altogether outside his reach, there would be no point in his attempts to understand and grasp it, only frustration and futility.

As man advances, whether in knowledge or art or character, that which is now beyond his grasp comes within the range of his reach; the transcendent becomes immanent. But It is never wholly possessed. Always there remain undiscovered truth to stimulate and intrigue the mind, unrealized beauty to sensitize and tease the spirit, higher and rarer achievement to challenge and command devotion. Indeed, with each new summit scaled, further and hitherto undisclosed ranges loom. The transcendent becomes increasingly immanent, yet is still always transcendent.

Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind and within the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something which gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.<sup>3</sup>

Religion is man's attempt to come to terms with that Reality, to achieve satisfactory relations with it. As he advances in religion, the element of "otherness" diminishes. The Beyond is discovered to be more and more "akin." God, the ineffable Mystery, is known and trusted as the Righteous and Loving Sovereign of life. He comes increasingly within man's knowledge and

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<sup>3</sup> A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, New York, Macmillan, 1925, pp. 267-268.

experience. Yet never entirely so. Still He is beyond man's comprehension and reach. "Otherness" persists.

2. What about man himself—the other pole in this relationship which is Religion? Here, also, we discover two major aspects of Man's nature. Two contrasted and sometimes conflicting motives tug within him and tend to sway his efforts:

- (a) There are certain insistent practical needs of his life that demand satisfaction—for food, for security, for help, for companionship, for assurance of the worth of living. These are things for which man deeply cares—his "values"—and for which he wants, if he can, to claim cosmic support.
- (b) But there is also—even at very primitive levels of life and increasingly as life advances upward—a yearning to *know*, to understand, to discover *the truth* about himself and his world. He wants the *facts* concerning the Beyond at whatever cost to his comfort, his self-assurance, his security. Here is the root of "intellectual inquiry," of the passion for truth. It is lodged deep within man's nature. Men want, if they can, to find the world favorable to their desires and to win Reality's assistance for their undertakings. But, at their highest, they want even more to know what Reality is.

Religion, then, arises out of the very nature of life itself—out of life's needs, its desires, its demands upon the world if it is to exist *and* to exist *with any real and profound satisfaction*.

It is often said that religion is mere "wishful thinking." Man *wants* to discover a Power or powers in the Universe who will assist him in his quest for life, and so he imagines that they exist and that they are friendly to him. Religion is man's device to buck up his own faltering courage through pathetic self-deception. In this charge, there is a double truth. Religion springs from man's deepest desires and never escapes this powerful, dynamic compulsion. And religion, even very mature religion, is always in danger of being somewhat swayed and warped by mere "wish-thinking." But, as a complete explanation of religion, this account founders fatally on two obdurate facts.

*First*, the Reality with which men have to do in their religion is never wholly favorable to their demands, never the Being whom their "wishes" would conjure up. As Dean Matthews says, with characteristically gentle wit:

If this is the sufficient explanation, it seems remarkable that men have invented such a formidable array of deities, many of whom, one would think, can scarcely have afforded comfort to any human being. If the race has been seeking reassurance from its religion, it has been singularly unfortunate in some of its imaginative flights.<sup>4</sup>

Man's desires, as they reach out into the Beyond in search of powers that will support their goals and give them what they want, run hard up against the inflexible

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<sup>4</sup> W. R. Matthews, *God in Christian Experience*, New York, Harper, 1930, p. 10.

character of Reality itself. It is their adjustment to this Reality, not what their imaginations fancy, that is their religion. "Wish-thinking" is forever under the inexorable discipline of Reality.

*Secondly*, such a view gravely misreads what men want. What are the "good things" men seek through religion? Even on the biological level, the quest is never merely for selfish ends, for self-preservation only.

The antithesis between egoism and altruism is artificial. The instinct of parenthood (the germ of all altruism) is as ancient and fundamental as the instinct of self-defence; the life-giving impulse is as primitive as the life-preserving. Self-realization through self-sacrifice is the law of life.<sup>5</sup>

As man advances, his conception of what is worth having, his "values," alter. More and more, "the life-giving impulse" that is rooted in his very nature becomes conscious and purposeful. His desires are no longer claimed merely by the necessities of food, protection, self-gratification (though these more elementary needs are never left behind), but by the glorious allurements of beauty, of right, of holiness, of truth.

Thus, strength is given to what is present from the very beginning—the yearning for "the truth about himself and his world" rather than for what his wants dictate, the yearning for Reality itself. This is an unfailing mark of the mature religious spirit. Man yearns to know, to be sure, to find sound and reasonable support

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<sup>5</sup> D. Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, New York, Harper, 1924, p. 73.

for what he feels should be true, what he longs to believe true, but over which his experience and his skeptical proclivities cast up great question marks. "Religion means to be true as well as effective and effective because true." Obdurate Reality itself encourages this intention.

Religion arises, then, from two factors deeply embedded within man's native make-up—surging, essential demands for what life feels must be had else it perish, *and* a sense for "what is" and longing to know It at all costs and to bring life into conformity with It. Neither factor is ever wholly absent. In elementary religion, demand dominates. In advanced religion, Reality rules. Religion's struggle to achieve maturity, to "come of age," is in no small part the tussle of these two contestants within man's soul.

In summary, Reality in its every aspect impresses man as at once familiar and mysterious, friendly and frightening. It stirs in him both assurance and apprehension, curiosity and comfort. It appeals alike to his theoretical and his practical interests. Man, in his turn, is motivated both by cowardice and by courage, by adventure and by apprehension, by desire for understanding and by need for realization. He is moved by both practical and theoretical concerns.

With man's advance in intelligence and in character, in understanding of Reality and in fidelity to the higher impulsions within his own spirit, the Beyond is discovered to be less mystifying though no whit less wonderful, *and* his own fulfillment is recognized as less the

satisfaction of wish in spite of Reality and more the conforming of life to the behest of Reality. Religion becomes more and more a gracious personal relationship. We shall see this more clearly as we turn from the question of religion's origins to its normal appearance within our own experience.

### III

Speaking of the occasions on which folk turn toward the Church, Dean Sperry says:

The world seeks the church, uncritically, habitually, at those times when life most matters. Parents who have drifted away from the church still bring their children back for baptism. Young people who profess to have outgrown religion still enter the church to be made man and wife. The last low whispers of the world's dead are not uniformly burdened with God's name but the church is always requisitioned to speak that name over those dead. In obedience to some deep unreasoned prompting men seek churches when life is most real.<sup>6</sup>

"Men seek religion when life is most real." If true, that is an extraordinary statement. And one of great significance.

"When life matters most . . . when life is most real." When *is* life most real? In almost every human pilgrimage there are at least six moments of unquestioned reality:

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<sup>6</sup> Willard L. Sperry, *Reality in Worship*, New York, Macmillan, 1925, p. 30.

1. The first is the *achievement of maturity*, "coming of age," the attainment of the "measure of the stature of the fulness of manhood or womanhood"—physical, intellectual, and spiritual. This may occur at adolescence or much later. It may be symbolized by graduation from school or college. It may be marked by one's first job, a "declaration of independence" of all the dependencies of early years. It may be crystallized in some concrete experience—perhaps the death of parents.

The truer and deeper attainment of maturity, however, is always the awakening to a sense of personal destiny. It is a realization of "what life's all about," that is, a *realization of Reality*. If it is a time of *genuine reality*, it brings a double recognition—of life as a gift and of the need of mankind. From that dual awareness, as from a positive and a negative pole of electricity, there flames eagerness for enlistment in the world's service. The mature vision declares, "All that I am, all that I possess, all that I may become, I owe. And because I owe, I ought."

This is, characteristically, a profoundly stirring occasion. It is no accident and no mere deference to tradition that each June finds ministers hopping from school graduation to college commencement, preaching baccalaureate sermons and giving commencement addresses. It is a perhaps unconscious recognition that this milestone in each person's pilgrimage—this occasion when, for a moment at least, life is seen in true perspective and known to be intensely "real"—is also a time of religious meaning. "Men seek religion whenever life is most real."

2. A second occasion of great reality is *marriage*. Who would question that? In principle and in ideal, it is life's one irrevocable decision. It is the one fork in life's pathway to which men can never return to retake. If the choice is later revoked, neither partner ever recovers the original place of decision. Further, it radically alters every aspect of existence. It is an adventurous lunge into the unknown and the unpredictable. In that profound sense, we marry in faith.

No one privileged to draw close to young persons standing on that threshold will ever question that marriage is, normally, an occasion stamped by two moods—reality and religion. Many and many a man or woman is more nearly his “real” self in the steps that precede that occasion, in the intention to which the occasion points, and in the declarations then made, than he has ever been or will ever be again. “To have and to hold from this day forward—for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health—to love and to cherish—till death us do part.” That is at once the most momentous and the most utterly “real” vow that our life knows. Any marriage that is more than a blasphemous travesty by two irresponsible infants, any marriage that casts an eye into the future toward the “generations yet to be” and thus discovers its fuller meaning, is an inescapably, profoundly religious occasion. No wonder “young people who profess to have outgrown religion still enter the church to be made man and wife.” It may be the “realist” thing they will ever do. “Men seek religion when life matters most.”

3. Another moment of great reality is—*parenthood*. In that experience, both father and mother will rise to heights of spiritual discernment, of tenderness, of character that they may never touch again. At one and the same time, they are closest to life's instinctive roots and to life's triumphant fulfillment.

They are more intimately related to Nature than they will ever be again. Here a man and a woman initiate something, the final result of which they cannot foresee and, once begun, cannot control. Then they are required to hand the whole matter over to Nature. Nature takes full command of them, of what they have initiated, and of the outcome. It is Nature who prompts them to perpetuate their race. It is Nature who shepherds and rules them all the while they fulfill her behest.

They are also closest to God. They are made active participants in God's essential nature, *creativity*. It is no accident that in the partnership of parenthood men and women find themselves most surely within the aura of religion. No wonder "parents who have drifted away from the church still bring their children back for baptism."

From this truth more insight is to be won than from perhaps any other episode in the human pilgrimage. If you would really understand what life's all about, draw near to a man and woman in the moment when new life is being brought into the world and before their spirits have relapsed into the world's casual and trivial commonplace.

This event is chiefly important because it is the most

vivid, as it is the most elemental and most exalted, illustration of that which lies closer to the inmost core of human nature than anything else. We are, by deepest nature, *creators*—creators of things, of homes, of cities and societies, of noble visions, of beauty, of a fairer world, above all creators of LIFE itself. To create that which is new and lovely and true and holy is to fulfill self. More than that, it is to achieve kinship with the frontal currents of Reality. It is, whether consciously or not, to come into living contact with God himself. For God, by his very being, is Creator. And man, in his deepest nature, is creator also. We are intended to be creators—creators together with God.

4. Still another time of reality is the experience of disappointment with self, of *failure*. Youth thinks little of this possibility. Yet in life's pilgrimage, few escape it: not always public shortcoming, which the world brands "failure," but a falling tragically short of one's own goals and ideals for himself. It may come in one's life work. Probably for eight men out of ten, their career bitterly disappoints their own reasonable expectations. It may come through the unforeseen loss of health and strength on which one had relied. It may come within the deep, hidden recesses of one's interior being, where no one sees—slavery to temptation, unconquerable indecision, willful false choice with inexorable consequences, unredeemable injury to the souls of others, gnawing loneliness—bitter disappointment with self. This, too, is an occasion when life's true values stand forth to rebuke us, and, often, to turn us from the un-

reality of our own selves toward the reality of religion.

5. Then there is *separation*. This experience, likewise, the precipitate perspective of youth seldom foresees. But come it will to every one. By common testimony, it is among the most surprising, disturbing crises of life. It may occur in youth through the loss of parents when overnight, in a moment, the boy or girl is thrust up a whole generation and the youth stands forth to face the world virtually alone, suddenly transformed into an adult. It may come in midstream when a life to which one has been knit by the most sustaining and demanding ties is wrenched away. It may come toward life's evening. One of the ablest and noblest women of my acquaintance, who had passed through an unparalleled sequence of personal tragedies with fortitude that confounded all who knew, confessed that the most difficult experience she had ever faced occurred long after these life-shattering events—in the death of her mother. The severance of those cords, woven in delicate intimacy over the years, brought strain and suffering such as had no previous misfortune. Many others would give similar testimony. A time of fresh reality, and not improbably of turning toward religion.

6. Then there is the final and decisive episode to which all else leads—the moment when we stand once more on the margin of human existence, now not to bid farewell to another but to yield to the constraint of that

journey ourselves. Life inexorably brings us to that shore, bearing us

With unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy

toward it. Here, as at our coming into the world, Nature once more takes command; and there is no escape. We are indissolubly linked to that which is at once elemental and ultimate. Here again that silent Parent who shepherded us into life and is now to bear us hence draws our unwilling spirits to reality and turns our thoughts to God. *Death* is life's inescapable reminder that our true destiny is Pilgrimage—perpetual, *eternal* Pilgrimage. Likewise, death brings the final decisive proof that our life is inextricably inwoven with religion. "The last low whispers of the world's dead are not uniformly burdened with God's name but the church is always requisitioned to speak that name over those dead." It is true: "In obedience to some deep unreasoned prompting men seek religion when life matters most, when life is most real."

Note that these six occasions are not all times of trouble or weakness when our desire is for a crutch, a comfort, an escape. This is refutation of the claim that men turn to religion only when up against insuperable difficulty. It is perhaps providential that three are occasions of perplexity, loneliness, uncertainty; three are occasions of exaltation, freedom, triumph. Three are times of testing sadness; three of consummate gladness. All six are, at once, moments of supreme reality

and of instinctive, almost irresistible, turning toward religion.

#### IV

What have we learned from our inquiry thus far?

1. Religion is organic to the warp and woof of life—*real* life—its whole course through. Religion may not be especially involved with *all* the issues of life. It is involved in life's *central* issues. This is attested by the origins of religion in mankind's history and in each man's experience; by the persistence of religion among all peoples and through all the ages; but, especially, by the fact that in life's moments of most vivid and vibrant reality—whether joyous or confounding—men **MUST** seek religion. The six episodes to which we have called attention are inescapable milestones on life's pilgrimage. Men vary greatly in their lives' pathways. But almost all pass through these gateways. And in those fated archways, we meet religion. Furthermore, what is true of the occasions of *great* reality in life ought to be true of life its whole course through—that is, “whenever life is most real.” Religion is part and parcel of man's normal existence.

2. Like all other aspects of man's experience that are rooted in the necessities of his being—ambition, love, friendship, faith—religion is not necessarily true and estimable. Like them, it is never merely neutral, colorless. It may be the source of the greatest good for man's life and his society. It may be the source of unspeakable harm. It may be *either*; it must be one or the other.

3. Since religion is inwoven with the very nature of man's being, the great understandings and certainties of faith—all of them—are *implicit in life*. The light we require for our comprehension of reality and the strength we need for our soul's courageous advance are to be sought here. It is in the simplest, most familiar, most elemental but most profound affairs of normal experience that the essential truths about life and reality lie embedded. It is in and through human lives that those truths are clearly disclosed and lay their grip upon us—in broken and opaque fashion, through all human lives; with peculiar hold, through our own lives; with special clarity, through great and true lives; supremely and altogether convincingly, through One Life. In and through the noblest human living, it is possible to know more of the truth and meaning of our world than in any other fashion. That truth lies so open to our sight that all who will may see. Steady, sustaining assurance of the reality and power of that truth is to be had through trust in lives where it is most clearly revealed. Entrance into its presence, possession by its reality, is not through cleverness of intellect or quantity of information, nor through involved reasoning or profound logic, nor through special revelation or mystic or esoteric insight. It is through eagerness, earnestness, honesty of seeking; and through integrity, daring, fidelity of living.

4. Finally, for *fullness of life*, true religion, high religion, is an absolute necessity. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our souls are restless until they find rest in Thee." For, "by some deep unreasoned prompt-

ing, men seek religion whenever life is most real." All we have been suggesting has been given classic portraiture in a lad who had gone the limit of dissipation and departure from reality. "And, when he came to *himself*, he said, 'I will arise, and go to my *Father*.' "

## CHAPTER II

### WHY CHRISTIANITY?

#### I

"RELIGION. Yes! But—*why Christianity?*" Often this is youth's most puzzled query in the whole matter of religion.

We have noted that Christianity comes to us today out of nineteen centuries of continuous and varied pilgrimage. It speaks a wisdom mellowed by long familiarity with every facet of human existence, enriched and refined by age-long exposure to the inexorable testing of history. Christian Faith embraces the proven findings of this vast body of experience. Any adequate account of it would need to report with some fullness the accumulated insights and judgment of the mature Christian mind.<sup>1</sup>

Our space forbids this. Rather, we must seek to fasten upon the crucial point in Christian Faith, the living center that furnishes both norm and vitalizing power for the whole. This is less difficult and less unsatisfactory than might be supposed.

What is Christian Faith? How shall we define it? Where shall we discover it? Available to our search is the great, broad stream of life and thought that took its

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<sup>1</sup>For an admirable summary of Christian conviction, see John C. Bennett's introductory volume in the Hazen series, *Christianity—and Our World*, especially pp. 4-15.

rise in Jesus of Nazareth and the tiny band who gathered to his call, and which has flowed down nineteen centuries toward us. This is the Christian Movement in the world. That stream has suffered shallows and whirlpools, eddies and stagnant marshes. But there is discernible a *central current* of both thought and life—strong, deep, relatively pure—which has supplied direction and power. It gushed unmistakably from the fountain-source. It has reappeared, issuing afresh and with renewed purity and sweep from each of the towering figures along the way—Paul and James and John, Augustine and Bernard and Francis, Luther and Wesley and Newman—down to our own day. To be sure, no two persons will survey that current identically. But there is little ground for difference. Christian Faith is that which has dwelt at the core of the beings of the Great Followers and has linked them in continuity with their Lord. And the test of their true position within the central current of the Christian Movement is: unmistakable kinship of mind and faith with Jesus Christ. He is the determinative norm of that which is authentically Christian within the Christian Movement.

The crucial importance of Jesus Christ becomes even more striking when one turns from the record of Christian history to the actualities of the Christian Movement in the world today. That Movement in its every aspect has one center, and one center only—Jesus Christ. The truth that Christianity offers to the world may be likened to an arch held in unity by a single keystone—the mind of Jesus Christ. The vast network of multitudinous and heterogeneous undertakings that the

Christian Movement is advancing clear around the world turns upon a single fulcrum—the spirit of Jesus Christ. The living organism of the Movement itself with its capacities for continuance, growth, expansion, and inexhaustible vitality has a single life-bestowing and empowering heart—Jesus Christ. Everything in Christianity that is most important roots back in him and has its center in him.<sup>2</sup>

The crucial centrality of Christ is confirmed also by the meaning he holds for those seeking an introduction to Christian Faith.

There is a characteristically witty but shrewd saying of Chesterton: "The only important thing about knowing the truth is to know the really important truth." For Christianity, the really important truths are discovered most clearly and convincingly in and through Jesus Christ. They are discovered there because they are disclosed there. They are disclosed there because they are lived and made real there; they are incarnate there.

Here is the test of what is essential and authentic in Christian Faith. Not everything that is valuable for Christians is found in Jesus Christ. Nineteen centuries of rich intercourse with reality have added much. There is nothing *indispensable* in Christian Faith that is not congruous with, indeed implicit in, the recorded faith of Jesus of Nazareth. What is else may be true and useful. It is secondary and accessory. And it is suspect

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<sup>2</sup> For a further elaboration of this point, see the author's *For the Healing of the Nations*, New York, Scribner, 1940, Epilogue, "The Crux of Christianity," from which this paragraph is taken.

until it has demonstrated intrinsic kinship with the Mind of Christ.

A simple but not inadequate definition of Christian Faith might be: *Christian Faith is faith in the faith of Jesus.* It is trusting oneself wholly to the convictions, the certainties, the hazards, the hopes to which he trusted his entire being. It is gambling everything—one's future, one's success, one's life—on those things to which he gave all.<sup>3</sup>

## II

Jesus' meaning for men may be found mainly at three points: in the *convictions of his mind*, in the *drama of his career*, in the *central temper of his spirit*. It is Christian certainty that the controlling convictions of Jesus' mind were true, and that they are the most important convictions for all human living in all times. It is Christian certainty that the forces that determined Jesus' career and brought him to an end of disgrace and failure are the most powerful forces in the life of every age, and that his way of meeting and mastering those forces is the only effective way. It is Christian certainty that the central temper of Jesus' spirit—deeper than convictions of the mind or acts of the life—his faith, was the highest possible for human life, and that such faith is the greatest and final need, for every life, always.

## III

*The controlling convictions of Jesus' mind were true;*

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<sup>3</sup> For a fuller and more adequate account, see Mary Ely Lyman, *Jesus*, in the Hazen series.

*they are the most important convictions for all human living in all times.*

Our customary thought of Jesus is as doer rather than thinker. We picture him most readily as busily pre-occupied in an incessant round of practical helpfulness, living fully amidst the interests of his day. It is easier to speak of the spirit or personality of Jesus than of the mind of Jesus.

Yet there is much to be said for the contention that it is as thinker that Jesus stands pre-eminent. Behind that gracious personality, behind its ministry of concrete friendliness were powerfully wrought and firmly held convictions.

That was the *source of his great public influence*. Not primarily because of his magnetic personality or even his powers of healing were men astonished and followed, but because "he spoke with authority." In all he said was an assurance, a power of conviction in union with insight, a grasp on truth that carried inescapable validity. Men could not dodge it. They knew he was right. They were up against a mind that saw truly.

That was the *cause of his end*. Men do not crucify a kindly and beneficent enthusiast, however misguided. They plotted Jesus' death because each time they came in contact with him, behind his generous deed or kindly word they sensed an outlook on life—a body of certainty—that ran directly athwart their own and threatened all they held most dear. Implicit in it was truth and power that would unseat them unless they first destroyed

him. It was Jesus' mind they feared; because of it they killed him.

By his mind Jesus will *win or lose men's ultimate allegiance*. He who would rule the world's life must be able to guide the world's thought. If you and I are finally gripped and held by the mastery of that figure, it will be because the passage of years and ripening experience drive us to some such realization as this: "He was right! He had the truth. He is truth! Here, with him, stand I; I can do no other."

We can cite only two of Jesus' underlying and often unrecognized convictions:

1. The first concerns *the nature of human life* itself, and *the fashion in which men may discover truth about it*. It appears to have been Jesus' conviction that *life* at its core is *fundamentally simple* and that the primary *condition for its comprehension* is not brilliance of intellect but *sincerity of spirit*.

We live in a day that seems hopelessly confusing. There can be no question about the baffling complexity of contemporary society. What has happened, I would suggest, is something like this. Modern man has built for himself this intricate, overpowering, unmanageable modern civilization—a civilization that he thought was his pride and which threatens to prove his death. Our lives, caught in the toils of the society we have built, are infected by its diseases. The confusion of the civilization around us works its way into our inmost spirits and creates confusion there. A pluralistic world-life makes pluralistic persons. Finally—the last step—we

read into the nature of Reality itself the complexity and confusion that dwell within our own spirits. Pluralistic persons imagine a pluralistic Universe. Man is up to his age-old tricks again, creating God in his own image. Having built for himself a pluralistic world-life, he now assumes that to be the nature of Ultimate Reality.

Yet, in our moments of deeper insight, we know this isn't altogether true. Life is not a madman's puzzle, a harassing and unintelligible phantasmagoria. Life is not so simple as to be uninteresting, nor so complex as to be unintelligible. We suspect that the child's approach may be more profound than the complex formulae of the philosophers. In Masefield's lines:

The trained mind outs the upright soul,  
As Jesus said the trained mind might,  
Being wiser than the sons of light;  
But trained men's minds are spread so thin,  
They let all sorts of darkness in,  
Whatever light man finds, they doubt it.  
They love not light, but talk about it.

Through the maze of modern existence—the complexity of the world about us, the confusion of inner life—moves the figure of Jesus, reassuring us that life at its core is not incomprehensible but intelligible, intelligible to all who will read aright their own experience, since its essential truths are few and simple. In the serenity and certainty of his own mind, he incarnated and thus demonstrated that simplicity.

Again it seems to have been Jesus' assumption that,

*in the crucial issues of life, men and women know what is right.* It was not his task to convince them of this truth or persuade them to that course of action, but merely to remind them of what they already knew, to make inescapable by a vivid figure or bit of keen insight the truth they already possessed.

They brought him questions—theological tangles and practical dilemmas. Who is to blame for inherited blindness? What will be the conditions of marriage in the next life? What attitude should men take up toward an overbearing ruler, toward Rome? What should be done with a grossly immoral woman? Sometimes he gave them a direct answer. More often, a story, an illustration, or a biting rebuke. Frequently, he turned their inquiry back upon them with a question in rejoinder, clearly hinting that their query was gratuitous. Almost always, what he really seemed to be saying to them was something like this: "Why do you ask me? You already know the answer. Allow your mind to become quiet in order that it can think, your insight poised in order that it can see. *There* is your answer."

Once he put it so bluntly that none could miss it. "You can read the sky for indications of the weather. How is it you cannot read the signs of the times?" Implicit in this saying, and in Jesus' unfailing attitude of which this is only a peculiarly striking expression, is the highest compliment that has ever been paid to our humanity—the assumption that all men and women possess capacities for the discernment of important truth.

If correct, this is an extraordinary fact. It is the most

fundamental characteristic of all Jesus' teaching. Argument and reasoning are almost wholly absent. There is analogy, parable, picture—reminders of truths already dimly sensed but evaded. He simply declares truth. There it is. Everyone honest with himself must recognize it. It is this which gives the words of Jesus their almost unbelievable dogmatism. It is this which gives them their weight of unique authority.

Is that not the way realization of all great truth comes to each one of us—not so much the discovery of something new as the awakening to something long familiar but neglected, distrusted, denied? Of one of the most effective preachers of our day it has been said, "He never tells me anything new. He reminds me of what I knew all along." That is the characteristic of all great teachers. They strike vibrant a deep note hidden in the recesses of our minds.

Once more it appears to have been a fixed assumption of Jesus that there is *a direct causal relation* between a man's *determination to know the truth* and *its discovery*, between the seeker's spiritual and moral integrity and his capacity for insight and wisdom. "Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and it shall be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives. The seeker finds. To him who knocks, the door swings wide." "Blessed are the pure in heart; they shall see God." "If the eye is single, the whole man is full of light." "Not every person who says 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who *does* the will of my Father in Heaven." And es-

pecially, "He who wills to do God's will shall know the truth."

Our world is so ordered that there are moral pre-conditions for the discovery of the most significant truth. This is a very simple assumption. It involves far-reaching implications: At its core this world of ours is moral, ethical, spiritual. Every man honest with himself will recognize this fact. Further he will discern the perennial struggle of right against the forces of wrong. He will see this as also the central battle of his own life. He must yield to an inner compulsion to give himself in alliance with and service to the highest. Only by a life so purified and attuned and dedicated may great truth be surely seen. Positively, to the life so purified, attuned, dedicated, truth and right are increasingly disclosed. The discovery of truth, therefore, is not primarily a matter of information or brain power or shrewd reasoning. Rather it is a matter of attunement—the attunement of our spirit and purposes to the motif of Reality—to the Purpose of God that we all dimly yet adequately recognize. The condition for the understanding of life and the knowledge of God is not merely *willingness* to do God's will; it is *eagerness, determination* to find it and to do it.

"He who wills to do God's Will shall know."

2. A second area of Jesus' underlying conviction concerns *the nature of the World*, and especially *the relation of human life to the Universe and God*. For Jesus, normal life is an unbroken unity and is in unity with the Reality that surrounds and conditions life.

To most of the dualisms that men through the ages have thrust up demanding a sharp "either-or" choice, Jesus' thought returns the reply, usually unspoken but assumed, "both-and." Note quickly three instances:

(a) *The Individual Life and the Life of the Community*

Jesus never visualizes persons in splendid isolation, but always within an intricate sustaining and demanding web of corporate relationships and responsibilities. One figure only furnishes adequate categories for his thought of human existence—that of *the family*—with its basic terms taken with the utmost seriousness. Every individual, in his relations with both his fellows and God, must *always* be thought of under the conditions and obligations and within the encompassing sustenance of a family experience—a family that reaches out in an ever-wider and unbroken network to embrace all men. We are, every one of us, born within, sustained by, inextricably involved with, and under absolute obligation to the whole company of humanity, the living body of mankind. It has been left to one who declined formal religious profession to voice the full Christian conviction in this matter in our time:

Years ago I recognized my kinship with all living being, and I made up my mind that I was not one whit better than the meanest of earth. I said then and I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene V. Debs.

In no small measure, the present tragic peril of our humanity is due to the persistent practical denial of this ineradicable Christian insight by a civilization that professed to base itself upon the Christian concept of "the infinite worth of the individual." Actually, that civilization took one half of the Christian conviction, wrenched it apart from its companion-truth, without which it is distorted and perverted, married it to an abstract, specious, and utterly selfish "individualism" which stands in radical defiance of the very essence of Jesus' faith, and produced that monstrosity, "Modern Man." With all of their aberrations and brutalities, the totalitarianisms, whether Fascist or Communist, represent a striving for recovery of the neglected Christian half-truth. Like the individualism from which they are in violent reaction, they also fasten on only one half of the full Christian view—the social interdependence and obligations of the individual—to the radical denial of its necessary counterpart, the worth and rights of every person. Today humanity breaks asunder from the mortal conflict of these two half-truths. Only history can declare which has more dangerously distorted Reality. Meantime, Modern Civilization may pay the price for their distortions with its very existence.

The Social Gospel—the conviction that Christian Faith has direct and inescapable implications for the corporate structure of society and that every Christian man is obligated to spend and be spent radically to re-order that society—is no corollary or appendix to Christian Faith. It is of its warp and woof, as central and ineradicable as any other strand. He who has not been

mastered by that insight and allowed his whole thought of man and society and religion to be refashioned by it has no real part with Christ's religion, whatever his profession of personal piety.

(b) *Human Life and the Divine Life. Ethics and Religion*

In every age, certain Christian interpreters have portrayed an impassable gulf between ourselves and God. In our day, this view is urged with more than usual vigor and extravagance.

There is not one iota of support for such a view in the recorded sayings, attitudes, or actions of Jesus. On the contrary, it is denied by Jesus' assumptions in his every contact with individual men and women as well as in what he taught them concerning themselves and God. For Jesus, God is, of course, the High and Holy Sovereign. But God is suggested always in one figure only—that of "Father." Jesus' presupposition is always One of infinite wisdom and unwearyed solicitude, ever near, ever accessible, ever readier of response than men of approach. In our thought of God's attitudes toward and relations with men, analogies drawn from familiar parental experience may be taken as dependable clues. "If you being evil give good gifts to your own children, how much more your Father in Heaven. . . ." The ready availability, the resourceful strategy, the undiscourageable confidence of parental concern are commonplaces of every man's knowledge.

The conception of an impassable gulf between men and God *may* be true. It has as much in common with

the conviction of Jesus of Nazareth as Nietzsche's philosophy with the faith of George Fox, or the ethics of Machiavelli with those of Francis of Assisi.

After the same fashion is the intimate interdependence of *each person's relations to God and to men, of religion and ethics, of faith and life*. It is not a question of one or the other, or of one tacked on to the other. Each relationship or reality is inextricably inwoven with the other, so inwoven that it is quite impossible to have one without the other. Religion no more gives birth to ethics than ethics to religion. It is God who enables me to see my neighbor as God sees him, and so to love him. But it may be my neighbor whose life and faith so disclose God to me that I discover the way—and courage to pursue it—for my own direct approach to God.

The author of the First Letter of John has stated the more neglected side of this double-truth in such clear and categorical fashion that none can dodge it. "If you do not love your brother whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you have not seen?" But there are others, and among them some of the noblest of the saints, who would insist that, had not God whom they had known and been loved by quickened their sympathies and illumined their imaginations, they could never have discerned that which is lovable in their brother. "We love because he first loved us."

#### (c) *Ends and the Means for Their Realization*

Here was one of the most harassing perplexities for Jesus' mind, as for every servant of a great Cause who

clearly discerns the Goal and is fired with the imperative necessity for its achievement. This issue tempted and tore his spirit in the days immediately after his first public acknowledgment of his life's task, at the Temptation. His Commission was clear enough: he was to be the Messenger and Servant of God in the proclamation of his Kingdom. But what of the methods? The means generally expected and with promise of immediate response and striking effectiveness were: to gratify the material desires of the populace, or to assert political and military Fuehrership, or to summon supernatural support in dramatic demonstration of Messiahship. Each was decisively rejected.

The question seems to have reasserted itself when the first wild and unthinking enthusiasm had given way to murmuring criticism and mounting disaffection. With a small band of intimate companions Jesus slipped away to rethink in the perspective of threatening indifference and failure the methods he had resolved to trust for the fulfillment of his Mission. Again, there was no sign of doubt regarding end, but only regarding means. There occurred a reaffirmation of his task *and* of his way of accomplishing it. Then he determined to carry his message to the heart of the nation's government and religion at Jerusalem.

Once more at the very last, when abysmal failure stared Jesus in the face, the question appears to have confronted him again in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me." After another tussle for inner certitude, resolution was reborn, and he set his face toward the Cross.

This is one of the crucial issues of life for every man and in every age—indeed, on every day. Does the end justify the means, especially if the means proposed is not too flagrantly at variance with the end clearly indicated? Or do we dwell within a moral economy in which goals and their attainment are so knit into one reality that there is no access toward them save along the tedious and sometimes tortuous way of their own nature?

To the man confronting baffling practical decisions where no ideal course opens and choice must be made between actions neither of which is wholly consistent with the ends desired, Jesus offers no rule-of-thumb. Every mortal is always directly or indirectly involved in means inconsistent with the highest ends. Jesus himself counseled obedience to a Civil Power that flaunted his goals. But he stands in judgment upon our easy acquiescence in conventional compromises. The employment of means we disapprove, even if unavoidable, can at best hold in check forces of greater evil and thus make possible positive construction of Good. The world is so fully a single garment of moral reality that worthy ends can be overtaken and brought into actuality only through methods and actions consistent with them, of the same texture.

Thus we have already been carried into the area of Jesus' second great meaning for men—*the drama of his career.*

#### IV

*The forces that determined Jesus' career and brought him to an end of disgrace and failure are the most*

*powerful forces in the life of every age; his way of meeting and mastering those forces is the only effective way.*

The significance of Jesus' career is not wholly disclosed in its end. But that end is its appropriate climax. By fastening attention there, we may gain clearest insight into the meaning of the whole.

There is no event in all history on which it is so difficult to obtain genuine objectivity as the crucifixion of Jesus. We are so accustomed to think of the Cross as one of the supreme events, perhaps the central event, of history and as one of the most appalling crimes of history that it never occurs to us to view it otherwise.

Had we never heard of the consequences of Jesus' death and were to visualize the facts of the crucifixion for the first time, probably two things would most impress us:

(a) *The Absurdity of It*

If Jesus was one who went about doing good, seeking to bring more abundant life for men, why in the world should they destroy him? On the face, it seems well nigh beyond belief. This very incredibility warns us to look deeper than we usually do into the reasons for it, and their meaning.

(b) *The Contemporary Inconsequence of It*

Looking back across 2,000 years, we think of it as the central event of all history. We tend to picture vast crowds, great excitement, tense awareness that some supreme tragedy, some world-shattering event, was be-

ing enacted. Had we been present at the time, probably what would have most struck us would have been its unimportance.

If we had chanced to wander out from Jerusalem on that crowded Passover-eve toward the edge of Calvary hill, it is likely that we would have seen no vast crowd. Rather a meager and dwindling few. A few soldiers and one officer, representing the Roman government—there to make certain that the Governor's orders were executed. A few Pharisees and priests, representing the Sanhedrin—there to see a quietus put upon this trouble-maker. A handful of friends, all that now remained of the throngs that once hung upon his words—there to see the bitter end of him who they had once thought might prove the Savior of his nation. And a curious, indifferent group like ourselves, its make-up changing from moment to moment—not many, and, as the day wore on, drifting away toward the more novel and agreeable diversions of the city. It requires no stretching of the imagination to see a thin flow of passers-by on their way to the festival, stopping for a minute or two, and then hurrying on, shaking their heads and commenting in the vernacular of the day, "Too bad! But, what difference does it make anyhow?" To those who observed the crucifixion of Jesus, what must have struck them most was the inconsequence of it all.

John Masefield has pictured it in his play, *Good Friday*.<sup>5</sup> At the end, Pilate and Herod, who had been at enmity for some time, use their common handling of Jesus' case as an occasion to make up their quarrel. For

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<sup>5</sup> New York, Macmillan, 1916.

them, the chief significance of this event is the healing of their friendship.

HEROD: Your generous act this morning was a sign

Of scrupulous justice done to me by you  
For all these years, unnoticed hitherto,  
Unrecognized, unthanked. I thank you now.

Give me your hand. . . .

PILATE: Herod, I bow

To what you say. To think that I have done

Something (I know not what) that has begun

A kindlier bond between us, touches home. . . .

Give me your hand; I have long hoped for this.

I need your help, and you, perhaps, need mine.

The tribes are restless on the border-line,  
The whole land seethes: the news from Rome is bad.

But this atones.

PROCULA: You named a generous act that he had done?

HEROD: This morning, yes! You sent that man to me

Because his crime was laid in Galilee.  
A little thing, but still it touched me close. . . .

By the by, what happened to the man?  
I sent him back to you; a rumor ran  
That he was crucified.

PILATE:

He was.

HEROD:

The priests

Rage upon points of doctrine at the  
feasts. . . .

He well deserved his death.

*They go in.*

Not improbably, to any contemporary observer also, the unstable restoration of an insincere friendship would have seemed the chief significance of that day.

This is the pathos of Calvary—not what it did to Jesus, but what it meant to those who saw it. The Cross is not a judgment upon Christ, nor even primarily upon his murderers, but upon the respectable well-intentioned onlookers like ourselves who beheld it and moved not a muscle to prevent it, indeed who had no comprehension of what they saw.

Why, then, did men crucify Jesus? What sent Jesus to the Cross was not the sins of personal life but the sins of public life. Not such sins as attack and down a man in his own chamber or scar his private relationships, but the sins that attack men when they meet in marketplace or parliament and make of our corporate relations dramas of personal ambition and intrigue, dog-fights of selfish passion. Among the crucifiers may have been some whose personal morals could not stand scrutiny. They did not put him to death on that account; he did

not threaten their private lusts. They crucified him because their social conventions were challenged, their social privileges imperiled, their social positions endangered. He appeared a political radical, a religious revolutionary. In brief, the crucifiers were not sinful men fearing exposure. They were public servants protecting the status quo. Jesus Christ was crucified by the bigotry of responsible public leadership and the complacent indifference of the masses.

In nineteen centuries, basic human nature has not changed perceptibly. Nor have the impulses and passions in men's make-up that strut across the arena of public events. The forces that destroyed Jesus are still the most powerful factors in mankind's corporate existence. Still these are the most dangerous enemies of his Will and his Kingdom:

the power of vested interests, political and religious;  
the irrational irresponsibility of fear;  
the insidious self-deception of ambition, pride, egotism;  
the inertia of complacent indifference.

He who has grasped the drama of that man's life has understood human history. He who has made himself sharer in that man's faith has made life's final decision.

## V

*The central temper of Jesus' spirit—deeper than convictions of the mind or acts of the life—his faith, was the highest possible for human life; such faith is the greatest and final need, for every life, always.*

Deep within every person's being are certain assur-

ances and assumptions that are, more nearly than anything else, that person's *reality*, his true self. They are assurances of that which is most certainly to be trusted. They are assumptions upon which life may most confidently be lived.

They are not identical with beliefs of the mind, these assurances and assumptions; and they cannot surely be deduced from a person's professed creed. One's creed may be either better or worse than his life or his faith.

On the other hand, they are not necessarily fully consistent with a person's practice, these assurances and assumptions; they cannot always be discerned through his actions. A man's faith may be either better or worse, truer or more hollow, than his conduct.

When spoken professions and unpremeditated actions and inner certainties are all of a piece, then and then only are we unified persons, whether scoundrels or saints. If speech and act and trust were wholly consistent with one another *and* wholly harmonious with Reality, then and then only would a person attain to the measure of the stature of true manhood or womanhood. Such a person would be "God in human flesh."

It is one way to define the greatness of Jesus to recognize that in him profession, practice, and faith were all of a piece. The sentiments his mind declared were the principles his life illustrated. Both were in seamless consistency because both proceeded unfailingly from that which was deeper, surer, and more potent than creed or conduct, precepts or practice—his faith.

If we can penetrate to these assurances and assumptions, we have reached that which is ultimate in human

personality. We can hardly do better than declare that Jesus' deepest faith was: trust—implicit, seemingly blind trust, trust against the clear evidence of events—in the ultimate effectiveness and final triumph of truth and right.

A man's faith is most clearly discerned in the few critical moments of his life when everything, even life itself, is at stake. If we would comprehend the faith of Jesus, we must turn our eyes to one point. We must draw close to him at the very end when the shadow of the Cross is no longer a distant premonition darkening the horizon from time to time but an immediate and inexorable inevitability. We must seek to accompany him to the Garden of Gethsemane when for the last time, and possibly for the first time, the end directly ahead with all its meaning of complete, abysmal failure stands clear and inescapable. We must hear his bitter appeal, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass." And then, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine."

What was the meaning of that cry? Fear of pain, it is sometimes said. Such an explanation is absurdly inadequate. Fear of disgrace, perhaps. We cannot imagine him shrinking from disgrace, however bitter. Fear of death, then. Surely Jesus was not one to fear death. No; but fear of *failure*. There is the enemy to shake the man devoted to principle. Failure that seemed to prove that he had been misguided, that the principles by which he had charted his course had been mistaken, that his faith had been misplaced. We may protest that it was not failure. We have nineteen centuries of history to guide our judgment. Jesus had nothing, noth-

ing but his faith. The evidence was all against it, so much so that even that faith appears to have wavered. But only for an instant. "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine."

We have defined Jesus' faith as trust in the triumph of truth and right. So to put it is to state the matter abstractly. That which confirmed Jesus' assumption of the moral unity of the world and therefore of the ultimate triumph of fidelity to the highest, that which guided him through this supreme testing and sustained him in the even more severe test of tomorrow's death was a warmer, more intimate, more certain assurance than that. It was certainty of the living, holy, utterly trustworthy Sovereign of Reality. It was confidence in God. In that, everything else was implicit. By that everything else received its surety, its power: the unity of each man and his fellows because all together are blood-brothers within a common humanity; God and man, religion and ethics, because the world of men is the world of God's fatherhood; ends and means, because they are knit within God's moral economy; the sure triumph of good, because God sustains it and secures its final irresistible effect.

## VI

We have defined Christian Faith as *faith in the faith of Jesus*. That is not the whole of it. In nineteen long and exciting centuries of pilgrimage, Christian Faith has learned much that could not have been accessible to a single person living out a career of less than forty years in the reign of Caesar Augustus. Nevertheless,

most of what we *most* need to *be certain of* concerning life and the Universe and human destiny is to be learned most surely through him. By his influence it will lay grip upon our loyalties most firmly.

His is the faith we are called to share. We have nineteen centuries of evidence to tell us that it works, that fidelity to this faith points the way of power, of victory. It is unlikely that that fact will convince us. Most mortals learn little and imperfectly from history. We shall require persuasion more living and gripping than that. Two things that held Jesus steady are available for our aid—conviction of right, and dim sense of the will and power of God. For us, however, there has been added a third factor—more intimate, more vital, more helpful. It is the example and companionship of One who was altogether faithful. He went that way. He calls us to join him and share his faith. When that faith has had opportunity to take full hold upon us, we shall cry: "He was right! He was—is—way, truth, life! Here, with him, stand I: I can do no other."

Whoso has felt the spirit of the highest  
Cannot confound nor doubt him nor deny.  
Yea, O World, though thou deniest  
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

## CHAPTER III

### WHY THE CHURCH?

#### I

"RELIGION, yes. . . . Christianity, perhaps. . . . But—*why the Church?*"

For some years, it has been possible to summarize youth's attitude toward Christianity in two phrases: (1) a steadily deepening interest in religion; and (2) a steadily mounting indifference to the institutions of religion—that is, toward the Church.

More recently, a third characteristic must be recorded—a feeling out after "the Church." Not after the existing churches as many youth have known them, to be sure—the Northern Presbyterian Church of Pinville, western South Carolina, or the "Christian" Church at Miller's Crossroad, glaring defiance across its four-corners at three other Christian congregations of various breeds. But after *something* that can be suggested only by the word "the Church." Indeed, no one who tests the pulse of contemporary sentiment can have failed to detect signs of a reviving interest in "the Church." Here, as always, the phrase to which men instinctively have recourse to voice their inarticulate longing has significance far beyond its obvious meaning. What is the deeper meaning of this turning toward "the Church"?

#### II

In part, it is clearly *a reaction from individualism*.

We have come out of a time when every man was his own theologian, every minister his own interpreter of final truth, every arbitrary whim of individual inspiration an absolute authority for that life and for others within its power. Today, despite the plague of dictators, individual omniscience in religion is at a discount. Yet, men must have guidance for belief and life. Where shall they find it unless in the accumulated wealth of wisdom within the life of the Church?

In part, the turning toward the Church is one phase of *a reviving interest in worship*. This is among the most unmistakable features of the contemporary scene. For some years, students whose theological conviction is of the flimsiest, who disdain the churches as they have known them, and whose intense concern is the practical salvaging of a distraught society, have been crying out for "worship." This leads to the Church—the only fully satisfying locus of worship as well as a treasure house of materials for worship.

In part, it springs from *a rediscovery of the riches of the past*. Or, more accurately, a "feeling out after" such a rediscovery. Not a few Christians today, and they among the more mature, seek a firm grounding for Christian living, not within the life of modern culture, or even of the traditional Protestantism in which their parents were reared, but in the rich, deep stream of cumulative experience that has flowed down nineteen centuries toward us. They would find a place within that tradition and drink deep of its insights and its faith.

There is a deeper spring of the contemporary reaching out toward "the Church." If it is partly a reflection

of the dominant temper of the times, it is also an instinctive *defense against the supreme menace of the times*. In a day of mounting totalitarianisms, when men's minds, their consciences, and even their lives are more and more conscripted in servitude to the nationalist State, how shall those things for which we most care—freedom of speech, tolerance, spiritual liberty, world brotherhood—survive, unless they secure a more effective champion that will, if need be, stand resolutely against the State and every pressure of organized coercion in defence of the life of the spirit? A recovery of the Church is a necessity for the health of religion in our day. More than that, it is a necessity for the survival of civilization.

To these factors must be added three other and more fundamental considerations that are weighing heavily with many of an older generation who once shared youth's disdain of the conventional church. They are beginning to make their importance felt among more thoughtful youth also:

A broader and deeper comprehension of what life really is.

A fuller and more accurate appreciation of what the Christian Church in history has, in fact, been and done.

A truer understanding of the rôle of the Christian Movement in the present crisis and for mankind's future.

### III

The world in which youth, especially college youth,

dwell is unavoidably but notoriously abstract and unreal. The university, far more than its citizens ever realize, is a world of its own and a world apart. Those who inhabit its privileged universe as students are very largely removed from normal home life, normal community life, normal associations with the masses of their own generation.

To revert to the distinction noted earlier between the private and the public phases of all human existence, the eager concerns of idealistic youth center largely upon the throbbing drama of public events. Yet even here, inevitably, youth views that world mainly from a detached perspective as a bystander rather than from within the maelstrom as a participant. That is one reason why youth's understanding of world issues is never wholly adequate. Moreover, youth's attention tends to focus on the larger but more distant problems rather than upon the pettier but nearer scene where the great issues find expression in miniature—upon world peace rather than the effecting of a harmonious university community; upon racial reconciliation in the nation rather than the position of Negro and Jew and Oriental in college; upon corruption in business rather than cheap and childish cheating in the classroom; upon political partisanship at Washington rather than the petty politics of the campus; upon social transformation on the grand scale rather than realistic attack upon the most puerile and indefensible system of social stratification and exclusiveness in the whole of American life, the fraternity-sorority racket. Failing to wrestle with the vices of the public order where they actually

challenge youth face-to-face, youth never fully comprehends their complexity and intractableness on the larger scene.

It is in the realm of private affairs, however, that youth's experience is more seriously abstract and unreal. Adolescence may be scarred by emotional stress and the 'teen years studded with romance. And youth often suffers misunderstanding, loneliness, frustration. But these episodes of the inner life are hardly of the texture of maturity. Of the six crucial milestones along the normal human pilgrimage, one (the achieving of maturity) usually marks the transition from youth, a second (marriage) looms just above the horizon, the others belong to the dim distance. Yet it is in these events of the private order and their surroundings that folk normally live a good half of their existence. As we noted, it is in these circumstances characteristically that people "seek the Church." If the Church often seems preoccupied with the personal problems of sickness, sadness, and separation, it is just because these are the features of existence with which most people are in fact occupied much of the time. This is not to excuse the Church's too frequent indifference and irrelevance to the great corporate issues. It is to set those shortcomings within a wider and truer context. Inevitably, the profounder significance of the Church eludes youth's prospect.

#### IV

For many, the first realization that the Christian Church has ever been anything other and more than the commonplace institution at Main and Market Streets

has come through a visit to one of the cathedral towns of Europe. To wander into the central square at Chartres or Antwerp or York, and suddenly to be confronted with the overtowering structure of the Cathedral, is to be transported in imagination into a world where the Church held meaning beyond anything Middletown or Miller's Crossroad suggests. It is to be silenced before the sheer *beauty* of the thing, and to have seep in on one the realization that, in the times of its erection, the Christian Church was the great creator and conserver of beauty. Then, on reflection, it is to awake to the *devotion* there embodied—plenty of perfunctory one-hour-a-week allegiance, doubtless; but also profound affection and loyalty speaking through consummate craftsmanship and tireless construction. Finally, on further reflection, the significance of the Cathedral's *centrality* may come home to the observer—centrality of location toward which every road and every activity of the medieval town and its surrounding countryside pointed, truly symbolizing an absolute centrality and primacy of influence. The Church of the Middle Ages was, in truth, the hub from which every communal concern radiated, the keystone holding in unity the diverse interests and loyalties of men and lifting them toward their ultimate Center above, the fulcrum upon which all human existence pivoted, the generator and director of dynamic energies for advance. It was the molder of thought, furnishing the only education available and wielding an undisputed intellectual authority. It was the sponsor of all good works—medicine, hospitals, orphanages, charity. It was the principal

arbiter of people's lives, administering much of the justice and wielding a mighty civic authority. It was the sole locus of worship, determining men's eternal destiny, and wielding final spiritual authority.

However, it is not necessary to look to Europe or to the Middle Ages for evidence of the historic importance of the Church. One need only stroll across a typical New England town Common and note, in the central position, the gracious white meetinghouse lifting its spire toward Heaven to be reminded that, in the times and life of the Founding Fathers, the Church held a comparable significance. One may even wander up Wall Street and, if imagination can dissolve the constructions of today, Manhattan of a century ago will re-emerge and Trinity Church, now dwarfed by skyscrapers, will recover its pre-eminence and centrality of both position and influence. Even today and anywhere on the earth's surface, one may go out to the last frontier of civilization and from there press on through wilderness or jungle until ultimately one emerges into a grass-grown clearing (contemporary equivalent of medieval square or New England Common) marked by three buildings—at the center, a church, and on either flank, hospital or school. Wherever the gifts of civilized living are first being brought to those wholly without their benefit, the Christian Church stands at the hub of existence, the bestower of education, of healing, of modern knowledge, of faith, and the unifying center for individual and corporate life.

These facts suggest the larger question, "What has

the Christian Church actually been throughout its history?" To this query, no neat and simple picture may be painted in reply. At various times and places in nineteen centuries, the Church has been not one but many different things.

To the detached historical eye, it gives the impression at any period after the third century of a gigantic body with two small and militant wings and a great hulking center. On one side is the *wing of reaction*—nursemaid of superstition and bigotry, enemy of science, sponsor of Crusades and Inquisition, sanctifier of corruption and immorality in high places—the Church of the Borgias and Rasputin and Elmer Gantry. At the center is the main bulk of the Church in every age, the conventional Church—a fairly representative cross-section of the contemporary community, somewhat purified and empowered by contact with its Founder and Lord—the churches of Middletown at Main and Market Streets. On the other side (rather far out ahead) is the *wing of creative life*—mother of the arts, sponsor of the philanthropies, father of reforms, begetter of revolutions—the Church of Paul and Augustine, of Francis and Abelard, of Luther and Erasmus, of Howard and Wilberforce and Livingstone and Nightingale, of Grenfell and Schweitzer—merciless critic of the conventional Church, unwearying purifier of the conventional Church, often martyred by the conventional Church, yet *always* born from the loins of the conventional Church—its child, its outcast, its redeemer. All these things, the Church has been, and is.

If we ask, "What have been the most significant characteristics of the Church at any period?" again history returns a complex answer:

*The Earliest Church*, progenitor of them all—informal spiritual fellowships without buildings, possessions, organization, ritual or public authority, welded by bonds of common experience and certainty and loyalty—oases of relatively clean life and hope and energy in a desert of deepening sterility—living cells within the dying organism of an empire, a culture, a civilization.

*The Church of Augustine*, teetering on the brink of a crumbling world—the one institution with sufficient inherent vitality and tenacity to survive the catastrophic disintegration of a whole civilization, thus bearing in its bosom the wealth of the funded treasures of man's past, and seeding them within the nascent civilization yet unborn.

*The Church of the Middle Ages*, center of all life, guardian of learning, of education, of philanthropy, of medicine, of justice, of faith—locus of authority over both temporal and spiritual destiny—above all, organ of unity, effecting the unity of local community through parish church and priest, effecting the unity of mankind through the authority of the papacy in the organism of Christendom.

*The Reformation Church*, again rescuing spiritual reality and freedom from the strangling grip of dry rot, this time the death-hand of a corrupt ecclesiastical hierarchy—proclaiming afresh an ideal for every soul that has always been of the essence of Christian faith

but which the Church has seldom dared to take seriously.

*The Church of the Nineteenth Century*, the most fertile and fruitful in the long sequence, fountain-source of the most notable succession of crusades for mankind's liberation and relief in history—for abolition of the slave trade, prison reform, abolition of slavery itself, improved conditions of labor, equality for women, elimination of child labor, temperance, world peace—power-house of the most wide-reaching and indomitable movement of extension ever undertaken, carrying its message of hope and its gifts of practical helpfulness to every continent and virtually every nation on the earth's surface.

*The Church of Today*, the single unshattered community of all peoples in a world racked with conflict and threatened with death. All these, and more, the Church has been.

From what the Church has in fact been, we may form our conception of what the Church should be. Five distinct functions for the life of mankind, the Christian Church has performed:

1. The Church has been the *custodian of the funded values of the past*. To the eye of the detached objective historian, this has been its most obvious rôle. It was the supreme service of the Church of the Roman Empire. In the hackneyed jibe that the Church is inherently conservative, there is this much truth—the Christian Church has been western civilization's great "conserver." As we noted earlier, it has watched empire

after empire, economy after economy, civilization after civilization rise, come to dominating power, have its day, and pass away. Through their advent and decline, it has persisted—corrupted more or less by participation in their success, shaken more or less in the convulsion of their fall—but continuing. More than that, it has preserved most of the salvage from their wreckage.

2. The Church, at its periods of widest public influence, has supplied *focal unity for corporate life*—for the daily life of common folk through their parish church, for the life of humanity through the conception of Christendom and of a single organic Body of Christ, the Church Universal. This was the Church's pre-eminent function in the medieval world; yet hardly less in the society of Elizabeth, or of Early America, or of our grandparents.

3. The Church has been the germinative *seedplot of the most fecund, most creative, most radical forces in the life of the time*. This was a striking characteristic of the Early Church—"these Christians will turn the world upside down." It has never been wholly absent. When the Church has been vitally alive, it has been powerfully present.

These are history's judgments upon the Church. But all through its pilgrimage, at every moment of that amazing biography of change and re-birth, of ebb and flow, the Church has been two other things—one much more obvious and mundane; the other much more intangible and ultimate, often hidden from the eye of the detached observer, but of the very essence of its being and its meaning.

4. It has been the *spiritual confidant and sustainer and friend* of uncounted hosts of ordinary folk. This is the Church of Pinville and Miller's Crossroad, the Church of Middletown at Main and Market—and of their progenitors in first century Corinth, and fourth century Rome, and twelfth century Chartres. In every era and at every moment of its history, the Church has been meeting folk in the intimacies of their souls' struggle, darkness, suffering, and triumph, where need pressed most heavily, ministering its light, its healing, its comfort, its challenge, its strength, its assurance.

5. The Church has furnished a sense of destiny, *a foretaste of the Ultimate Goal of the human pilgrimage*, both individual and corporate. For the Church *is* not only what all the world sees but what the Church intends, what it would become. That end is not a human institution but the family of God, the Kingdom of God. Men labor in and through the Church that it may more nearly achieve its true destiny—the Kingdom of God.

A contemporary apologist for the Church quotes Pericles' plea in behalf of Athens, "Think what she *may become* and be worthy of her." With equal appropriateness, it might be said, "Think what the Church *has been*, and be worthy of her."

## V

So much for the Church of the past. What of the Church today, of the Christian Movement in 1940?

We are likely to cast a sidelong glance at Main and

Market Streets and raise our eyebrows. Face to face with our chaotic, crumbling world, that Church appears a pid dling, pitiable thing. It is—unless its meager energies are caught up within and find significance through a greater reality—the Church-of-Christ-in-the-world.

What is the Christian World Movement?<sup>1</sup> Three things, at least:

1. It is an *agency of manifold and immeasurable helpfulness to individuals and communities.*

One sees this most clearly when he observes the Church at work amidst the most unprivileged, neglected, and needy. For example, consider Christianity among primitive peoples.

Only one who has observed primitive life at first hand can form an adequate picture. Reports will be discounted as one-sided and exaggerated. There is no shortage of food, no unemployment, no destitution. But in tropical climates where tuberculosis, leprosy, hernia, cholera, trachoma thrive, there is no doctor within hundreds or thousands of miles, no medicine save the frightening and futile rigamarole of a village medicine man. Not only are there no schools. There is no written language; therefore no access to history, art, culture, knowledge, civilization. Of morals, it need only be said that they are at primitive level. Most serious of all is the spiritual outlook. For among primitive

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<sup>1</sup> An attempt at a fuller picture of the Christian World Movement is given in a little book, *For the Healing of the Nations: Impressions of Christianity Around the World* (New York, Scribner, 1940), upon which the following paragraphs draw freely.

peoples, religion is the matrix of social cohesion, the guardian of traditions and taboos, the administrator of morality, the interpreter of their Universe, the awesome determiner of their faith and their fate. Primitive religion is a complex of grotesque, sordid, immoral, and horrific superstitions (inwoven with gracious or naively childish elements), whose principal effect upon its adherents is an overshadowing, all-pervasive apprehension and dread.

Penetrating the jungle or wilderness comes the Christian Church. Do we imagine it, after the caricatures of not so long ago, in the person of a long-haired missionary in long black coat, umbrella under arm, setting up an improvised pulpit under a palm tree and, Bible in hand, exhorting his naked auditors to eschew their heathen ways and accept Christ? Rather, we must imagine the Church epitomized in three or four persons —minister, teacher, doctor, nurse, possibly a language-expert or agriculturalist or social worker. A clearing is cut. Simple buildings go up—church, school, hospital.

Rumor filters through the jungle. Litters are borne from long distances carrying chronic invalids—some blind for decades from trachoma, others writhing in acute agony with hernia, tuberculars incipient and advanced, lepers outcast from their homes and communities. Children are sent long distances to the school. Improved methods of farming are instituted. Better houses are erected. Sanitation is taught. A leper asylum offers haven and treatment for primitive society's most feared and despised pariahs. From their center, the team of colleagues go forth in varied ministries in

every direction as far as human strength permits. Branch dispensaries are inaugurated to be attended by periodic visits from itinerant doctor or nurse. Village schools are started as rapidly as native teachers can be trained. Little chapels draw the more earnest and inquiring and sensitive together for simple, comradely, reverent worship. Slowly, fear is dispelled, superstition is laid aside, a wholly new outlook on existence takes their place, drunkenness and adultery and gambling cease, and the core of the beings of the people comes under sway of a simple, confident, joyous faith. And so on and on.

All through inner Asia, straight across the Middle East, in practically the whole of the interior of Africa and much of its littoral, widely among the islands of the seas, not to speak of remoter areas in China, Siam, India, the Near East, and sections of Latin America, there are millions upon millions, hundreds of millions of men, women, and children whose lives, day in and day out, are invariably shadowed by disease without medicine, by ignorance without enlightenment, by gnawing fear without faith. And who will have none of these things which we regard as the basic necessities of existence unless and until the Christian Church brings them thither.

Only less dramatic and striking is the significance of this basic work of the Christian Movement in lands of ancient culture and more advanced civilization.

Take *medicine*. All over India, appalling conditions of disease, undernourishment, malformation, epidemic,

lack of sanitation, superstition regarding physical handicaps cry for an unlimited expansion of the healing, educative services of Christian medicine. In Greater New York, there is one doctor for every five hundred of the population. In a certain province of China there is one doctor with modern medical training for every million people.

Take a matter of special interest to youth and students—*higher education for women*. Visitors to this country often report their impression that the most interesting and attractive feature of American life is the American woman's college. That contribution, American women, through the Church, have taken to the ends of the earth. Clear across the world one comes upon them—in Japan and China and Korea, in India and the Near East, in Africa and Latin America—the American woman's college in all its beauty of setting, its charm of atmosphere, its freedom and vitality of thought, transplanted thither by American college alumnae, planted in strange soil, now firmly rooted and indigenous, growing vigorously and healthily as a native plant. In Japan, it is only in the Christian colleges that women may gain the liberal education that is so essential if that land is to go forward to a humane culture and constructive international relations. In India and the Near East, where Hinduism and Islam have laid tethering restrictions upon womanhood, holding her to the status of housewife and mother, young women in the Christian colleges drink deep of the learning and the disciplined freedom of modern education. In Korea, the only institution of higher education for

women in a land of 20,000,000 is the little Ewha College near Seoul. Among primitive peoples just emerging from the superstitions and binding mores of communal life, there would be small hope of even the most elementary education for women were it not for Christian Missions and their schools. Yet here women are advancing side by side with men in the parity of life and thought and opportunity that is one of the noblest ideals of Christian civilization. So, whether it be the provision of higher education for women where no other is available, or the progressive leadership of women's education where government institutions now follow the lead of Christian missions, Christian colleges have pioneered and are continuing to pioneer advance for their sex all over the world.

One might add instances from a dozen other fields—the lifting of agriculture by introduction of modern knowledge and methods for a whole province in China; improved stock breeding to meet the desperate cattle problem of India; the development of new, cheap, and sanitary houses for the dwellers in village mud huts who constitute the great bulk of India's teeming millions; housing experiments and model communities for great cities; sanitary systems for congested slums or for jungle villages; care of outcast segments of the population, such as lepers and feeble-minded; beginnings in social service; community surveys and town planning. *The Christian Movement is the only world-wide agency with a conception, a strategy, and a determination for the amelioration of basic human need and the furnishing of the essentials of true living for all mankind.*

History shows the Church to have been the prophetic pioneer into almost every area of humanitarian service, educational advance, and social reform. In lands where Christian ideals have worked their slow but pervasive effect through the centuries, these tasks have gradually been taken over by the agencies of the secular community. In areas of the world where the Christian Movement is a recent arrival, it is performing today its age-old rôle of guardian of the dispossessed and pioneer in behalf of the pressing needs of humanity. *There is no other organization or movement reaching out toward every corner of the earth, toward every people and every aspect of their life—for health and enlightenment, for reconciliation and redemption.*

Behind these obvious and tangible needs that make an immediate appeal to American practicality, there are always the far profounder though subtler yearnings of the human spirit for understanding of human existence, for ideals and moving loyalties, for inner resources against life's temptations and bafflements, for assurance of God and his Concern and Power—that is, for living, intelligible, guiding, and gripping religious faith.

2. *Secondly, the Christian World Movement is a force of very considerable importance for the life of individual nations.*

Most people, inside or outside the Church, think of its influence almost entirely in terms of spiritual helpfulness to individuals. They assume that its significance for the life of nations is negligible. This is especially

true in their conceptions of the Church overseas. This assumption springs in part from the idea that, since the Church is working mainly among the depressed and neediest classes, its appeal is mainly to the lower strata of society. There is strong evidence to precisely the opposite conclusion. It is the cultured and educated leadership of the Orient to whom Christianity has made strongest appeal and who have given it the most convinced adherence.

Note a single illustration. Turn to China. Study carefully China's leadership. The population of this largest nation in the world numbers close to 450,000,000. The Christian constituency in China, both Protestant and Catholic, cannot greatly exceed 4,000,000—roughly one per cent. Yet, if one runs his eye through the pages of China's *Who's Who?*, he will be startled to find that one in every six is a Christian. Equally impressive in a land noted for its reverence for learning is the fact that just half of those listed in *Who's Who?* have been educated in the Christian schools and colleges of China. If one turns directly to the personnel of China's leadership, he discovers the impact of Christian influence in three concentric circles.

At the head of China's government, and at the very core of her national existence as at once the responsible rulers and the trusted inspirers of her entire people, is a group of hardly more than two dozen men and women charged with the major tasks in this hour of supreme national emergency. A good half of them are Christians. Conventional Christians, it may be asked, like those who head the governments of so-called "Chris-

tian nations"? A few of them, doubtless. But most of them Christians gripped and guided by a depth of personal religious experience and consecration almost unknown among persons in comparable positions in the West. Small wonder that it is increasingly recognized that China has today the most Christian leadership of any government in the world.

Surrounding this group at the heart of administration is a more numerous and wider circle of Christians in various important positions—the chiefs of government departments, the heads of national educational institutions, leaders among labor and in the many movements for social relief and reform. China is a land in which poverty, malnutrition, and suffering are endemic; floods, famine, and plague periodically epidemic. Recent years have witnessed the rise of a steady succession of vigorous movements for amelioration and improvement, concerned with famine relief and prevention, child welfare, emancipation of women, working conditions of labor, elimination of opium and mass illiteracy, housing reform, rural reconstruction. Almost every one of these movements has been initiated and is today directed and largely supported by Chinese Christians.

Beyond this far-flung company of Christians in varied governmental and civic tasks is a still wider circle of Christian influence, this time not in the persons of professing Christians but through those whose training for leadership has been in Christian schools and colleges. In every phase of national service one meets men and women whose ideal for their nation and whose

devotion to the public welfare are the direct fruit of Christian education.

It is hardly too much to say that the greatest hope for China's future rests in that tiny band of devoted Christians at the heart of her government, then in the wider circle scattered through every phase of national leadership, and finally in the influences that have flowed and continue to flow out into the stream of national life from institutions of the Christian Movement in China.

Yet China furnishes only an especially striking illustration. In the most diverse circumstances, in every part of the world, and at every level of cultural and political advance—as the civilizing agency for a whole people, as in Fiji; as the only mediator of healing, learning, morality, spiritual ideals amidst tribe after tribe of primitive folk; as chief source of leadership for public service among a suppressed nation like Korea; as the mightiest single force for the regeneration and emancipation of the most populous of all nations in China—the Christian Movement stands forth upon the record of history as a formative influence of quite incalculable dimensions.

### *3. Third, the Christian Church is a factor within the world of nations.*

Has the Christian Movement any real significance for the complex and baffling realm of international affairs? This question presses with inescapable insistence at an hour when once again the forces the

Church representatives have failed to prevent war virtually world wide, when almost every instrument of international association has broken down, when the whole earth is threatened with domination by ruthless totalitarian tyrannies and the recurrent conflicts that the rivalries of those tyrannies seem certain to produce.

It is important to face to the full what the Church *cannot* accomplish. Clearly, it is not yet able to prevent war even though it should engulf all humanity. That is partly because, while men talk of "Christian nations" and "Christian civilization," Christian Faith has furnished only a thin veneer upon the selfishness and brutality of national policies; in every nation, real Christians are still a small and struggling minority. It is partly because Christians themselves, while committed to the ideal of international order, are not yet converted to paying the price for its realization either through their own sacrifices or through the sacrifices of their respective nations. It is partly because the Church is not, and should never be, a political agency; it cannot and must not employ the measures that could halt dictators or assure the speedy triumph of peace and right in a world so largely under the rule of naked force.

On the other hand, it is equally important to recognize what the Christian Movement is doing. Three points deserve special attention:

(a) The leadership of Protestant and Orthodox Christendom has been steadily drawing together in deeper and more effective unity. This has been taking place at precisely the time when the nations were being torn asunder by the most powerful centrifugal forces of pas-

sion and unreason in modern history. Here is decisive refutation of the charge that the Church is just a reflection of secular culture. At the very moment when mankind was being swept into armed camps and the last pretense of world-unity and world-culture was being shattered, the Christian churches (excepting always the Church of Rome) were coming into the closest unity of thought and fellowship and even organization in a thousand years.

These developments find their climax in the formation of a World Council of Churches which already embraces the greater part of Protestant Christendom and which will speak and act within assigned limits in behalf of the whole non-Roman World Christian Movement. The actual consummation of this new organization has been deferred by the present wars; it has been deferred, not abandoned.

(b) Such reality as World Christendom has achieved continues today strained but unshaken by the forces that have shattered virtually every other world organization and community. From its headquarters in Geneva, citizens of Germany, France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, China, and the United States go forth in behalf of the churches of the world in manifold activities—in relief of victims of war, in assistance to churches bereft of normal support, in world-wide study of the conditions for just and enduring peace, in maintaining contacts between Christians of enemy nations, above all in preserving and even strengthening the reality of the life of the World Christian Community.

On a certain night last spring, British bombs dropped

accidentally in the courtyard of the World Council's headquarters at Geneva, smashing every window. The next morning's mail brought formal notification of adherence to the Council from one of its most important members—the Church of England. As Dr. Visser 't Hooft, the General Secretary, wrote, "Is this not perhaps a symbol? While bombs drop in increasing numbers, the Christian fellowship increases."

(c) The Christian Movement is preparing leadership for the better day that may lie beyond the darkness of this hour. In every nation it is raising up men and women committed to the achievement of world peace, fully cognizant of the conditions of national sacrifice by which alone it might be realized, and deeply schooled in the reality of World Community through membership in the World Church. *It is the only agency raising up world-minded leadership throughout the world.*

The significance of all this must be judged less by comparison with an ultimate ideal that still lacks much of realization than by comparison with other world forces and movements upon which men had confidently relied to assure peace and bind the nations into unity. It is doubtful if one of these (with the single but noteworthy exception of the Communist Party) continues today in effective operation. World Christendom carries on.

As I have elsewhere written:

Christianity has become at last a world movement; that Movement is today the only living, growing, powerful world movement.

The Christian Church has become a Universal Church; that Church is today the only World Community.

In our shattered and confused and apprehensive world there now remains one and only one unshattered, undaunted, resolute world community of men and women: It is the world-wide movement of Protestant and Orthodox Christendom.

## EPILOGUE

### THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT AND TOMORROW'S WORLD

#### I

FINALLY, what of the Future? What are the prospects for Christianity in the days immediately ahead? What rôle may the Christian Movement claim in tomorrow's world?

The truth is—no one can possibly sketch even in broad outline the dimensions and contours of "the world of tomorrow." Despite self-confident predictions from one and another quarter, no mortal possesses sufficient wisdom to descry the route by which mankind must make pilgrimage through that hidden future. Certain inescapable features of the experience of the pilgrims can be forecast. It will be a period of rapid and largely unpredictable change. It will be a time when, whatever the conclusion of the present struggles, vast masses of humanity must endure privation, suffering, radical re-orientation of life. It will be an epoch when, as far into the distance as imagination can penetrate, the great human values of liberty of mind and speech, self-determination of individuals and peoples, international community, social advance of every kind will stand under ominous peril. More than that, one can hardly say. Like Abraham of old, this generation is called to go out into a country which is its rightful heritage, and it must go out, not knowing whither it goes.

## II

Our survey of the Christian Movement in history showed its major functions to have been five:

1. *custodian of the values of the past;*
2. *focal center for corporate life;*
3. *seedplot of creative, revolutionary forces in society;*
4. *spiritual confidant and sustainer and friend of ordinary folk;*
5. *promise of the ultimate destiny of mankind's pilgrimage.*

Now, turn toward that future whose specific details are so indiscernible but whose general character is so unmistakable.

1. We face the threat of the disintegration of our civilization, certainly of drastic and painful transitions with inevitable peril for the delicate and precious riches of the passing order. One of the great needs of our day is *a conserver of the funded values of the present.* Will the Christian Church again perform its historic mission? The greater question is, "If the Church does not, what agency will?"

2. No single feature of the immediate past was more significant than the disintegration of the great binding unities within society. The universal concepts that symbolized and sustained those unities—Christendom, Civilization, Liberty, Rights of Man, Brotherhood, Mankind—were fading from speech. They had lost grip upon human devotion and thus upon the actual structure of society. Their most widely acclaimed successor, radical individualism, with its fateful progeny—disdain

of the great instinctive loyalties, denial of the essentially organic character of existence, fragmentation of the hard-built cohesions of civilized order, arrogant self-concern and self-conceit—stands in well-deserved discredit. In its place, the current trend is toward new unifications. This is the meaning of totalitarianism. With all our distaste for its specific forms, we dare not evade that meaning. It stands as an extreme judgment upon the unsound, and radically unchristian, individualism of our fathers' golden age. We shall never vanquish its might or correct its brutalities or fend off its recurrence unless we build a civilization as far removed from our fathers' complacent and corrupt utopia as from totalitarian tyrannies.

Here is the lesson—men's life, in small companies and in large, *must* have community. It *will* have it in our day. The great question is, on what basis? Around what center? Another of today's great needs is *an agent of cohesion for corporate life*. Sound and enduring unities can be effected only through recognition of the *inherently, indissolubly* organic character of all human existence. Unity in human affairs is authentic, and therefore safe, only beneath the overarching Divine Unity, that is to say, under universal recognition of the Universal Fatherhood of God. Of this truth, essential and structural to ordered society, the Church is the fallible earthly symbol. If the Church does not supply the center of unity for which men crave, the unity they *must have*, where else shall we look?

3. Our times require, too, *regeneration*—the discharge into a sick, chaotic, despairing humanity of forces for

its rejuvenation and transformation. The dying civilization has lost its nerve and its faith. The "New Orders" proclaimed for both Asia and the West, with all their dynamic energy and fruitful corrective, represent retrogression, not advance. Humanity stands in desperate want of renerving.

Moreover, in every age, there is the indispensable task of proclaiming new and higher ideals for mankind's life, and of prophetic pioneering in their behalf. Who shall supply this indispensable service unless it be lonely, daring, indomitable figures thrust up from the commonplace tedium of the conventional church—perennial begetter of prophets and pioneers and martyrs?

4. Those who must adventure through difficult and uncertain territory ahead will meantime be traversing the familiar episodes that have faced every normal pilgrim in earlier periods. For most of them, the thrilling or frightening shape of outward events will have rather less importance than the soul-making and spirit-shattering happenings of personal life. Indeed, tensity and change in the public order will heighten inner stress. They will require the services of that agency which "in every era and at every moment of history has been meeting folk in the intimacies of their souls' struggle, darkness, suffering, and triumph, where need pressed most heavily, ministering its light, its healing, its comfort, its challenge, its strength, its assurance."

5. Lastly, through its conception of the Kingdom of God, and through its all too hesitant loyalty to that ideal, the Christian Movement holds before men *a norm for social endeavor and the goal toward which all true social*

*advance moves.* More than that, falteringly, often pitifully, the Church offers a measure of demonstration of its reality. "Thus in broken and imperfect fashion, the Church is even now fulfilling its calling to be within itself a foretaste of the redeemed family of God which He has purposed humanity to be."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The World Mission of the Church* (Madras Conference Report), p. 16.

## FURTHER READING

(*The suggestions are confined to references that carry the thought of this book further.*)

### CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE PRESENT CRISIS

John C. Bennett. *Christianity—and Our World*. Association Press, 1936, 50c.

The clearest and best balanced preface to the problem. Invaluable.

Henry P. Van Dusen. *God in These Times*. Scribner, 1935, \$2.00.

Contains fuller development of certain points in Foreword and Chapter I of this book.

### WHY RELIGION?

D. Miall Edwards. *The Philosophy of Religion*. Harper, 1924, \$1.75.

The most useful introduction to the nature of religion, especially its psychological and sociological aspects.

W. R. Matthews. *God in Christian Experience*. Harper, 1930, \$3.00.

The most helpful single book on the problem of God. Early chapters examine the sources of religion in human experience.

John Baillie. *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul*. Scribner, 1926, \$2.00.

Just what the title implies.

### WHY CHRISTIANITY?

Mary Ely Lyman. *Jesus*. Association Press, 1937, 50c.

A simple but beautiful discussion of the sources and the Life.

Walter Russell Bowie. *The Master: A Portrait*. Scribner, 1938, \$2.50.

One of the most satisfying biographies of Jesus.

J. A. Robertson. *The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Jesus*. Doran, 1925, \$2.00.

A daring and suggestive exploration of Jesus' inner consciousness.

## WHY THE CHURCH?

George Stewart. *The Church.* Association Press, 1938, 50c.

A comprehensive and catholic summary.

Kenneth Scott Latourette. *Anno Domini.* Harper, 1940, \$2.50.

The record of the Christian Movement, especially in the past century.

Henry P. Van Dusen. *For the Healing of the Nations: Impressions of Christianity Around the World.* Scribner, 1940, \$1.00.

An interpretation of World Christianity today.

## THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT AND TOMORROW'S WORLD

Kenneth Scott Latourette. *Toward a World Christian Fellowship.* Association Press, 1938, 50c.

Ernest Fremont Tittle. *Christians in an Unchristian Society.* Association Press, 1939, 50c.

Gregory Vlastos. *Christian Faith and Democracy.* Association Press, 1939, 50c.

Three Hazen volumes dealing with major aspects of the subject.

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